

Crawford Gates

History



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Professor of Composition/Theory/Conducting
Interview September 11, 2008

Education

College of the Pacific, Columbia University, 1939

BA, San Jose State College (now San Jose State University), 1943

MA, Brigham Young University, 1948

PhD, Eastman School of Music at University of Rochester, 1953

Interview with Mike Ohman- September 11, 2008

What brought you and when did you come to BYU?

I was in the Amphibious Forces of the Navy during World War II. I was trained to invade Japan. I would take six little boats with 50 men in each with the ships into the beach of Japan. And then, if I survived that, which many did not, I would go back for three days without any sleep and keep bringing food, medical supplies, ammunition, whatever was needed on the beach for the men who were losing their lives trying to ward the enemy. That happened in a number of different preliminary invasions of the Japanese held islands in the Pacific before they hit the mainland, including Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Tarawa. But my name didn't show up with my six boats and my six crews to make a circle and to go into the beaches to make the invasion. And I thought, "I'll bet the reason my name didn't show up on Iwo Jima and Okinawa is because I'm a music major, and they think a music major can't possibly become a naval officer with that important, deathly kind of an assignment." I found out later that had nothing to do with it: they were saving two million of us to go into Japan, so the men who were making those other invasions were beyond the two million of us; there must have been two and a half million. I also found out that of those who had my job, only three out of ten came back. Seven out of ten got killed in every one of the invasions. So I knew that my chances of going into Japan and coming out alive were very small.

At that time, I was the communication officer in Pearl Harbor, and I read the document that identified the invasion of Japan; it was in July of 1945, three weeks before the atom bomb. That document said, "We are not giving the exact date of the invasion, but it is right on top of us. You will get another communication that will tell you the exact hour, the exact minute that we are going to hit the beaches of Japan. We expect to lose one million American lives; we expect to kill a million Japanese." That would be the biggest slaughter in the history of the world: two million men in less than six weeks. We talk about losing four thousand in Iraq; two million is quite a bit more than that. But that did not happen because the atom bomb stopped it. President Truman had a choice to make: either kill 100,000 Japanese at Hiroshima, and maybe Nagasaki, in one second, or lose a million American lives and kill a million Japanese. I don't think the Japanese know that the atom bomb saved a million Japanese lives. That bomb saved a million American lives as well, including mine. I have 30 in my family, and that 30 wouldn't exist, and a million other American families of 30 would not exist if not for that bomb. So it was a great blessing what President Truman did. He did do a terrible thing—he killed 100,000, but it was much better than the two million that it could have been.

I got out of the service in June of 1946, and I bought a used car for \$500. A drunk driver hit me on the Bay Shore Highway between Palo Alto and San Jose with a group of young LDS

people in my car. None of us were hurt, but my car was damaged. The judge decided that the drunk who hit me had to pay me 50 bucks for the cost of my insurance. While my car was getting fixed, I got a call from Salt Lake City. It was my missionary companion, Howard Smith, who was a great grandson of both Heber J. Grant and Joseph F. Smith. He was on the KSL engineering staff, and he said, “KSL has just fired their music director. Would you like the job?”

I said, “Of course. I don’t have a job; I just got out of the service. I can come up.”

He said, “Get up here tonight. This job won’t last past noon tomorrow.” So I arrived there that night. Lowell Durham also applied for the job. I knew him threw his brother, who had been a mission companion of mine, and we have become life-long friends. He saw my picture and I had seen his when I went for the job.

I thought, “If Lowell Durham is applying for this job, I’m dead.”

And he said, “If Crawford Gates is applying for this job, I’m dead.” But he got the job, and he said, “I want to have Gates as my orchestrator; he writes well, and we don’t have that now. So please make the job open for him and employ him.” K.S.L. did that and that’s how I got to Utah: I came to get a job that I didn’t get, and I got a job that I didn’t apply for. And that kept me here. Then Lowell said, “Go study with LeRoy Robertson, he’s a great teacher and a wonderful composer. You’ll get a great deal.”

So I went down to Provo and met Brother Robertson, and for the next 25 years he treated me as a son. He was not only my teacher, but he was a beloved parent to me, he being a generation older than I was. And he taught me wonderfully well. He was a

fabulous teacher of composition. I have studied composition with a number of others in California where I grew up, and at Eastman, and other places, such as Tanglewood; but none of those teachers taught as well as LeRoy Robertson. He was direct and motivating. One thing that made him such a good teacher was that he would never rewrite my material. Some teachers will reach over the page and say, “Well, you could do this a little better.”

He never did that. He would say, “There’s a principle involved in this passage. Let me articulate that principle.” And then he would proceed to explain what the principle was that I had violated, or at least not fully realized. Then he would ask me, “Does that principle make sense?” He might even invite me to articulate the principle in my own words so that we both understood what the principle was. Then he would ask me, “Do you see where your writing has not really been in sync with that principle at this point?” He always said it softly, it was never forceful.

And then I would say, “Yes, I think I do see it.” And then I would articulate what I thought he was telling me.

But he’d say, “Now I don’t demand that you rewrite this passage, but remember the principle for the next time, and the next piece.” Most of the time I would try to articulate it in that present one because that was the benefit of having it articulated, and then I would proceed. And I thought that was a marvelous way of teaching.

Howard Hansen at Eastman School was the other great teacher with whom I studied, and he did something quite similar, in essence, to LeRoy Robertson; and so my two years with him were marvelous. I was stimulated; I became a better composer because of my being with LeRoy Robertson. I also became a

member of his family. I was with him the night he died in the Salt Lake Hospital. I was conducting *Promised Valley* that night in the summer of 1971, and his family gave me ten minutes alone with him. I said to Brother Robertson, “You changed my life.” I was able to express to him my affection and respect for the gift of himself that he had given to me. As he was dying, he was still articulate; and he said something complementary to me about the kind of student I was. Then we both exchanged brotherly affection and respect—he the great teacher, and I the student, who had worked with him for two years. He died about three or four hours after I left the hospital. It was one of my great experiences at BYU to study with a first-rate teacher and a first-rate composer: LeRoy Robertson.

To have associations with professors on that level is tender. Many of us have had great teachers in our lives, but to make them not only friend, but family—that’s a gift from you to him and him to you.

I can tell one other thing about LeRoy Robertson that was of great value to me: In 1947 I composed the score to a musical play called *Promised Valley*, which was created by the state of Utah for the celebration of the Centennial. In 1847, Mormon Pioneers came into the Utah Valley; in 1947, we celebrated that. One part of the celebration was a big extravaganza, similar to *Oklahoma* on Broadway. And the state said, “We want a production that will treat Utah the way *Oklahoma* on Broadway treated the state of Oklahoma. We want something that has that beauty and appeal.”

The Good Lord blessed me, and I was awarded the contract on January 6, 1947. They provided me a classroom on the third floor of the MIA building, right across from the Salt Lake Temple. They cleaned a classroom, brought me a piano, a desk, the

contract, a check for a third of the contract, a pencil sharpener, and a thousand sheets of score paper that I had designed. My first act after they left the room was to kneel down and thank the Lord that that wonderful gift had been given to me.

Promised Valley became a very great success, much better than I ever dreamed it would be. The University of Utah stadium was completely filled for three weeks. The Utah Symphony was booked for six weeks—three in rehearsals, three in nightly performances. We had a Broadway cast with Helen Tamaris, one of the great choreographers of all time, for whom I had written five ballets, choreographing the musical. The whole production was a great success. It was popular success: it filled the place every night for three weeks; it rained out one night, so they put an extra night on the end. Secondly, it was critical success: Lowell Durham was a friend of mine with the *Critic* of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, so of course he gave me a good review; but Con Harrison, with whom I was not very close, gave me a good review as well. So I had a wonderful response from the critical end of things. But financial success: it made a lot of money! Composers don’t usually get attached that early in life to something that makes a big pot of money for the state of Utah. In fact, it made so much money that it was able to pay for a lot of other Centennial events that didn’t make enough money to pay for themselves. It was a great popular, critical, and financial success.

In December of 1947, LeRoy Robertson won the Reichold Symphonic Award, which was \$25,000. In today’s economy, that would be about a quarter of a million dollars. Now, Maurice Abravanel, the other big musical giant to come to Utah, came in the fall of ’47, right after *Promised Valley*. He was the great musical professional from Berlin, Paris, New York, and here he was in Utah now. He heard

about this wonderful production that had been such a fabulous success. He called me up. I was Mr. Nobody at age 25.

He phoned me up, took me to lunch, and said, "I understand you've been the focus of a marvelous musical success here." Trying to be modest, I said, "You're very kind."

He said, "I need to see the score."

I had to tell him, "I don't have the score."

"You don't have a score to a thing as important as this!?" he said.

I explained, "Well, I have the master sheets to it, but we had to Scotch tape the 600 pages together. The poor conductor had 600 pages of Scotch tape. I don't want to give you that. I don't have it, but I will get you one."

So I spent \$100 in the economy of 1947 to get a big, beautiful, full score, bound in maroon leather with gold letters. It was fabulous. So I was able to give Abravanel this great, big, fat book. And he kept it for a week and then phoned me again and said, "Pretty powerful score for a 25 year-old kid. You know what we should do? We should have you conduct the highlights of this with the Utah Symphony and the original cast chorus, which I understand is still in the area, and some of the top soloists in the state, in one of my concerts in my first year as conductor of the Utah Symphony."

Here is a world-famous conductor giving an unknown that kind of a privilege. Can you imagine what affection I had for that man? So, in February of 1948, we performed *Promised Valley*. The Tabernacle was packed that night because *Promised Valley* was going to be resurrected in a concert version. The original choir performed, and they did it without being

paid because they wanted to do *Promised Valley* again.

After the performance, Abravanel came up and gave me a big bear hug. He said, "I want you to be my assistant conductor." And I had to tell him that I had just been accepted to the Eastman School of Music and I couldn't accept the job. But he was wonderful to me, and he let me guest-conduct 25 times. And later on he asked me to be his associate conductor. I loved the man, and I had a deep affection and respect for him for the next 32 years of his life. He commissioned three big works of mine, one of which was my 4th Symphony.

The Eastman School of Music was one of the great schools of the world, particularly for composers. They financed bringing the Rochester Philharmonic into the school for a week every year to perform and record the orchestral works of the eight doctorate degree and 16 master's degree composers. That doesn't happen in Vienna, or London, or Paris, or Berlin, and certainly not in New York with the New York Philharmonic next to Julliard, or Curtis next door to the Philadelphia Orchestra. That doesn't happen anywhere else in the world, but at Eastman. That is why I wanted to go there. So, in early February of 1948, having finished my master's degree under Robertson, I applied to Eastman, but I was turned down. I did not make the top eight. There must have been 50, or maybe 100 composers all over the world that applied for those eight spots, and I wasn't in the top eight. I reported that to my teacher, LeRoy Robertson, almost with tears in my eyes: "I didn't make it." He was angered by that. The head of Eastman School was Howard Hansen. He was also the judge of the Reichold Symphony Award that LeRoy Robertson had won the previous December.

So soon after, Robertson phoned up his friend Howard Hansen and he said, “Howard, I know you didn’t make the judgment on the eight slots for the doctoral candidates who are composers from all over the world. I know you probably have a committee that does that. I know you didn’t do it. But I want to let you know that that Crawford Gates, whom you turned down, is one of the best composing students I’ve ever had in my life, and I think he must be worthy of one of those eight slots.”

I got a telegram 24 hours later: Eastman School had admitted me into the top eight. I don’t know what happened to the other eighth guy—whether he bailed out or they kicked him out—but there were only eight of us when I got there.

We played and recorded all our pieces, and they added me to the faculty as a graduate assistant shortly thereafter. I taught a first year theory class, and I read the orchestration papers of the undergraduates for Burrill Philips. It was a great experience, and it was all made possible was my teacher LeRoy Robertson with one phone call where it counted. I was very fortunate. So Maurice Abravanel and LeRoy Robertson were my two godfathers, musically.

When I was still working on a master’s degree at BYU, I taught a first-year theory class. I remember one day the kids all brought in pop and donuts to celebrate something. I was so afraid Dean Garret de Jong would come up and examine me while everyone was whooping it up with pop and donuts. But he didn’t show up that day.

Lawrence Sardon, John Halliday, J.J. Keeler, and I all taught first year theory while I was still a student. Before I finished my M.A., Dean de Jong and John Halliday invited me to have a full-time job as a faculty member in

theory that fall. I had to turn that down because I had been accepted by that great miracle into Eastman.

I told them, “I can’t stay here, I’ve got to go to Eastman. If I turn them down, I’ll never get back.”

Dean de Jong said, “That’s okay. We’ll make a deal with you. How long will you be at Eastman?”

“Two full years and maybe a couple summers after that.”

“I tell you what:” he said, “you go to Eastman, we’ll give you a job every summer. You graduate in 1950; we’ll have your place open for you here.” That’s how it worked out. I taught as a graduate student first year theory, I taught the summers of 1948-50. Then in the fall of 1950, I was back on the BYU campus as a full-time assistant professor.

While I was at Eastman, I tried to find out who my biggest competition was. I found a man named Robert Crane, who has now retired from teaching composition at the University of Wisconsin for 60 years. I chose a cubicle near him so that I could watch him write and watch him work and talk to him, so I could make this competition my friend. I remember the first time the Rochester Philharmonic came into the Eastman School while I was there and played these 24 new orchestral works in one week’s time. Even the *New York Times* said, “The Rochester Philharmonic isn’t the New York Philharmonic, they’re not as good as N.Y.P. is, but they sure play contemporary music better. They play 24 new pieces a year and the New York Philharmonic and others just play two or three.”

By coincidence, on Thursday of that first week, the orchestra played both mine and

Crane's pieces right next to each other on the same morning. I got with him on the elevator afterwards, and I can remember exactly what he said to me: "Damn you, Gates. My piece is better than yours...but yours sounded better." After that, I became known as the best orchestrator at Eastman because of Bob Crane's say-so.

After you completed your education and got your doctorate at Eastman, what happened in your life?

I came back to BYU and taught orchestration, etc. from 1950-66. I had the students study all the woodwind instruments, all the orchestral instruments: their range, their transposition, their idiosyncrasies; and then I helped them pick out a piano piece that might lend itself to orchestrating for woodwinds, taking into consideration the range of the piece and what liberties they could take with the original piano piece to make it fit with woodwinds. They wrote their own arrangements of those, and I brought in the instruments to the classroom, and their arrangements all got played, and those that wanted to conduct their own arrangements had the privilege, and we recorded all of them. We did the same thing for brasses and the same thing for strings. The percussionists composed a piece for percussion instead of orchestrating from a piano piece. The students who took that class, among whom were Jim Mason and Newell Dayley, said that was a great experience because they really learned how to orchestrate because, not only did we talk about it, but they actually wrote for it, and then they heard their recordings and we discussed what was good and what needed improvement. I would say to them, "You listen to this recording, tell me what you think is really satisfactory and what is not. I don't need to tell you; you tell me." And they thought that procedure of evaluating their own experiences was very

valuable for them. I thought that was a very successful way to teach orchestration.

I became the BYU Music department chair in 1960 for six years: two terms of three years each. At that time there were about 50 faculty members and between 350-400 music majors. That was when we were starting to think seriously about the Fine Arts Center. That got serious enough in 1962 that it actually started to happen. John Halliday did all the preliminary work for it. They dug the ground in '62, and we moved into it in '64 from the lower campus. And that experience was very wonderful because each of the five chairs met with William Pereira, the nationally known architect from Los Angeles, but we did most of the consultation with two of his assistants. They would come up about every two or three weeks and meet with the six of us: the dean, who was Conan Mathews at that time, and the five chairs. And we tried to interpret for them our architectural needs based on our curriculum at that time, or what it might be in the near future, in terms of size and substance and amount. And then they would translate that into the architecture and come up with the new plans the next time. Then we would discuss it and give critical judgment to the plans as pertaining to our needs.

As chair, I made it a point to meet with Conan Mathews every week. I made out the agenda, and the first thing on the agenda was his agenda, if he had one for me. And then I gave a report on what had happened from the previous agenda, and then new items, or items that were still in process. And I initiated the action on that, and I don't know if he did that with his other chairs, or if anyone else ever asked for it; but that was irrelevant to me. What was relevant to me was my relationship with my dean. I wanted him to approve every new area that I was hitting, and I wanted that approval to be mine in advance; and if it wasn't, then I would drop it, or I would come

back with a better argument. And I did both of those methods more than one time.

I was married in 1952, but before that, I dated a number of my students, which would be intolerable today. Ernest Wilkinson, the president of the university, complimented me on my choice one time. And the strangest thing is that I belonged to the campus branch, and the bishop was a student. I met my wife at a stake dance in San Francisco, which was my stake. I was 27, and she was 17. She wouldn't be caught dead with an old man of 27, and I wouldn't go out with a teenager. And so that didn't amount to anything. Four years later, however, I was on an MIA assignment to San Francisco, which was not my home stake anymore. She was a stake music director in the MIA, so she came to my class. We had a dance afterwards, and I danced with a pretty 21-year old; and that didn't make any difference that I was almost 31 then. She was mature, so she didn't brush me off. And within four months we were married in the temple by Spencer W. Kimball. We have four wonderful children and fifteen grandchildren, one of which just passed away from brain cancer when he was three. The great blessing of our lives, besides a temple marriage, an eternal marriage, is the fact that all my children and grandchildren are faithful and active in the church. And that's the top of the line, besides my good health at age 86. Every day, I thank the Lord for my family and for my health.

You left BYU in 1966, and then where did you go?

I went to Beloit, Wisconsin, which is a small industrial city on the border to Illinois. I got invited to guest-conduct their symphony orchestra. Now, in the United States there are 1400 symphony orchestras that pay. And in 1963 I had a sabbatical leave. I was looking for something to do for either six months or

one term or a full year. There is a national association of symphony orchestras, and they put out bulletins where all their vacancies are published so anyone can find out where there is a need for a conductor in the United States or Canada. I was a member of that association, so I just got their publication and found out there was a vacancy for nine months in Beloit, Wisconsin. They had an orchestra of 75 pieces, and they had been in business for ten years, and they were financially solvent. Their conductor accepted a position as the assistant conductor of the Honolulu Symphony, which he took as a sabbatical for himself, so they were looking for his replacement. Now, I knew that whenever there was an opening, there were almost 200 applicants for that opening. I applied for that position for my sabbatical. Out of 200 applicants, they chose me because in 1951, 12 years earlier, I was on the MIA General Board, and one of my assignments at that time was to conduct the youth choir and the youth orchestra in the Tabernacle on June Conference, which was almost as big as General Conference.

The MIA youth from Ogden, Logan, Salt Lake, and Provo sang in a 1000-voice youth choir in a concert held in Salt Lake for the National Federation of Music Clubs, which is an international organization of music lovers who meet once a year for six days. They have very talented musicians perform concerts everyday of their conference, and they support local music groups. Vera Dougan from Beloit Wisconsin was the president of the NFMC. She saw me conduct the concert from memory. And she was impressed with that.

So, when she saw that I was applying for the position as conductor of the Beloit symphony, she said, "That's the guy to get. I saw him conduct in Salt Lake City. Not an orchestra—I saw him conduct a choir from memory. Wonderful pieces, wonderful, big, 1000-voice

choir, all kids 14-20.” She nominated me to be the one her committee chose and called me up, saying, “We want you to come to Beloit for nine months in response to this opening.” I was there nine months, and I conducted my entire repertoire that year from memory.

The family came back with me. My youngest son, David, was in kindergarten, and Betsy, his sister, 13 months older, went to first grade; they loved their teachers. The neighborhood loved us. We were heralded in the paper all the time. At the end of that wonderful year, in early June, we met with the returning director and talked about our experiences, his in Honolulu and mine at Beloit. Within three or four months, he got a job at three times the salary at a bigger orchestra in the South. He commuted for the first month, but flying 800 miles every week exhausted him. He decided to quit Beloit, and immediately, a national search went out for his replacement. 200 conductors applied for the position, but I didn’t even respond to that because I wasn’t in the market for another full-time job. I still had a year as chairman in the Music Department at BYU in the new Fine Arts building.

But, Beloit phoned me up and said, “We brought all three of the finalists into a rehearsal to be interviewed, and we don’t like any one of them as much as we like you, and we want you to come back next year.”

I told them, “I am honored, but I cannot do that. My integrity to my president and to my dean and to my colleagues prevents me from accepting your invitation. I committed myself to work as department chair for two three-year terms. I am in the second year of the second term, and I cannot go. Maybe another time, but I cannot now.” That was the end of it—or so I thought.

About two weeks later they phoned me again and said, “We’ve decided we want you. We will offer you the job with a big increase in pay for the following year. You said you’re through with your appointment at BYU by then.” I couldn’t turn that down.

So we went back to Beloit. I thought, “I’ll be here three years, and I’ll have other offers,” which I did have, but I didn’t take any other offers because two things happened: First, I got a second orchestra in Quincy, Illinois, which I got in a similar way to the other job, but instead of competing against 200, there were only four of us; second, Rockford lost its conductor of 27 years, and I took his place. It was a big 85-piece orchestra with a big budget, so they didn’t have a national search.

The word spread in Rockford that there was a fireball up in Beloit causing good things to happen. All of a sudden, six to ten middle-aged people from Rockford in suits and dresses and hats started coming to my rehearsals. I didn’t even know who they were. Then one of them phoned me and said, “We’ve been watching you; we want you as our new conductor. Come down and we’ll talk about it at lunch.”

I met with them, but my wife said, “You cannot possibly do three orchestras. That is absolute insanity, even if you could work the calendar out.” So I didn’t take the job at that time. But I got another offer later, which I took. It broke my heart to report to my dear beloved friends at Quincy that I was leaving.

I said, “I feel terrible to tell you that I’ve got a new offer that I can’t turn down—much bigger than Quincy and much bigger than Beloit.”

That really took us out of the poverty level that we had enjoyed at BYU. After 16 years, I left Rockford because I was worn out, and my

family was all gone by that time. My wife was Relief Society President for 14 years in a stake that was 100 miles each way. The sisters all loved her; she was an angel of mercy to all those little wards and branches all over Southern Wisconsin. We thought I came back to Southern Wisconsin to conduct three symphony orchestras, but that wasn't the real reason—it was to build the kingdom. We went from a little humble branch to a stake center. And then I became a bishop of a Beloit ward and we had 23 single sisters in that ward. It was a small ward, but 23 is still a lot of single sisters, and I had to be concerned with their welfare: the widows and the divorcées and those who never married. So the reason the Lord brought us to Wisconsin was to build the kingdom; the orchestra and the money was just a bonus on the side. But we loved it there, and we had a great experience.

The orchestra treated me wonderfully well. They respected me. I know some conductors who get in fights with their orchestras, but I told my orchestra in Beloit, "I'm trying to make this a big, loving family." There were a couple of arguments between the players: two women in my first violin section, one of them left because the other one treated her so badly. I went after that girl and took her to lunch out 30 miles away. I said to her, "We need you back. We all love you and we don't want you to leave. I'll work it out with this other gal so that she doesn't bother you anymore. I'll put her in a different part of the orchestra."

Norman Paulu was the former first violinist in the Pro Arte String Quartet, one of the world's most prestigious string quartets. He was the concert master of the Madison Symphony for 20 years before he was our concert master for three years in the 1990s. He was the chair of violin at the University of Wisconsin, and he knew all the top musicians

in the area. He told me one day, "I might be interested in that [concert master] job."

I said, "We can't possibly afford you."

"Try me," he said. He finally came down to \$200 a service—that's peanuts compared to what he was making.

So he came and worked as our concert master for three years until he retired, and the whole string section improved. He performed a solo with the orchestra, and during the last rehearsal, he said, "I want to speak to the orchestra for just a minute before I leave tomorrow night. I've been with this orchestra, with you beloved people, for three years; I've been the concert master at the Madison Symphony for 20 years; I've been principal violin for the Pro Arte String Quartet for 25 years; and I played before that in a number of other fine orchestras—all of them had more technical proficiency than the Beloit Janesville Symphony, but none of them had the spirit of this great orchestra." That was the greatest compliment that I could have had. My desire to build a loving family came true, and he recognized it and told the players that he loved them and that he was proud to be their concert master for the three years. That was one of the great nights of my life.

Have you retired from performing?

Yes. I retired from performing in 1999 because I got the biggest commission of my life when Milton Barlow asked me to write an opera on Joseph Smith. He gave me a large budget for my travel to communicate with the librettist. The budget for my copy work was not even necessary because a millionaire and former BYU student said he would do it, but he would not accept my big fat budget.

How many works have you written?

869 works! They are all in the Crawford Gates Archive in the Harold B. Lee Library. I have given opus numbers to them since I was eight years old, and so they are all numbered properly. There are about 34 of them that I have lost, but everything else is there, including scores, parts, publications, and recordings. I want to make one other comment about BYU. I have a great affection for my colleagues and my students. I felt that the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires us to love each other, and it is a pleasure to love each other. And I told you about my love for LeRoy Robertson and Maurice Abravanel, who were my principal mentors: LeRoy here at BYU and Abravanel outside. But I had one remarkable experience as chair. When I first became chair, one of the first things I heard about was a young, brilliant, LDS pianist from California. Her high school music teacher was not LDS. He asked her where she was going to college, and she told him, “I’m going to Brigham Young University: BYU.”

He responded almost with a slur, “BYU, what’s that?”

When I heard that, it disturbed me because BYU has been sending out their choir, their orchestra, their band, their dance companies, their Program Bureau to California as one of their principal targets.

“How is there a music educator in California that thinks that little of BYU as to say a slurring, insulting thing to an LDS student?” “We have got to try and change that.” I thought to myself, “How can I change it? I can take the three best choirs we’ve got—300 voices—and a 100-piece orchestra, beefed up with the brass choirs, and do two blockbuster masterpieces for the Music Educators National Conference in California. So there will be an audience of 3000 music educators, and we can knock ’em dead with the Bach *Magnificat* and Walton’s *Belshazzar’s Feast* in

one performance.” The first thing to do was to get permission for a gigantic budget to make that possible because there had never been a tour of 400 students in one shot—I don’t think there has been one since then.

I had just had a great success with *Sand in Their Shoes*, which was produced by BYU on a \$65,000 budget, and we made more than that back from full-house audiences for a week’s performances two years in a row. So President Ernest Wilkinson was kind and loving toward me because I had made that big success, and that it was his idea to do that. The school financed it and then made all this money back. So, when I said I wanted to take 400 students on tour to perform the *Belshazzar’s Feast*, he approved it. And then he gave me a man to do the leg work and the business, and I did most of the planning. In fact, I went to all of the halls in California and found out that there was an MENC conference coming up a year and a half or two years in advance (this was in ’61 that we started to plan it; we did it in ’63), and I went down there and measured the halls because with a choir and an orchestra that big, I wanted to make sure we would have enough room on the stage for 400 people and their music stands and their instruments and so forth. The halls were all big enough.

First, we had to build the tour around the conference; then we had to get booked by the conference. James Mason, my former student, was the Vice President of the MENC, and he helped to book us a year and a half in advance.

The next task was to prepare the music, so I needed to get my faculty and my students revved up for it. I presented the program to the faculty and to the music majors, and they all thought it was marvelous that it was going to happen. Well, the choir people prepared it wonderfully well. And Lawrence Sardoni was the head of the orchestra, and Ralph Laycock

had the brass. I asked their permission to hold regular sectional rehearsals of each of 14 sections of this combined orchestra: just the flutes, just the oboes, just the clarinets, just the bassoons, just the French horns, and just the violas, and so forth, and then the two brass choirs separately, and then all the percussion alone. We had three-hour rehearsals from 5:00 A.M. to 8:00 A.M. on weekday mornings. I got some flack on that from the students, so I said, “Brother So-and-so, I’m going to do this 14 times; I’m only asking you to do it once. If I do it 14 times at 5:00 in the morning, will you come to the one that I ask you to come to, and come on time and stay the whole time?” I said it in a nice voice, and I didn’t have any flack after that.

So we started the final rehearsals, and that 100-piece orchestra and those brass choirs sounded like they were the New York Philharmonic. They sounded fabulous! We had polished every bad, tough part—polished it vigorously. And all the students were so enthusiastic about the trip.

We made the trip with 12 busses and a big truck with five men to work as our stage-hands. Ernest gave us all the money, and we made the budget bigger by staying in motels. We went first to Las Vegas then to Bakersfield for the conference of 3300 music educators. We had Roy Samuelson as the soloist, who later became the head of the voice department at the University of Indiana, where he sang opera.

It was a fabulous performance. After the *Magnificat*, the audience just rose with a big roar; after *Belshazzar’s Feast*, they tore the place down. I thought, “There’s no music educator who’s going to say, ‘BYU, what’s that?’ after that experience. They’re going to say, ‘BYU—boy! Did you hear *Belshazzar’s Feast*? Did you hear the *Magnificat*? Fabulous!’”

After that, we went to the Shrine Auditorium. The *L.A. Times*, who had been criticizing the L.A. Philharmonic Orchestra for their lousy performances, gave the BYU orchestra and chorus a rave review. Then we performed in San Francisco and ended our tour in Salt Lake City at the Tabernacle.

After one of the performances, one of my former teachers from my freshman year came up to me, gave me a big bear hug, and said, “I never dreamed you’d do this—40 years later.” My object was to prevent music educators from ever saying to an 18-year old, talented, LDS pianist, “BYU, what’s that?” I don’t think that that event has ever been superseded by any other. The sheer size of it makes it unique, but the on top of that, the quality was superb. It was a happy experience, and I felt that that was one of my gifts to BYU.

You have also given of yourself to several new generations, who have been very successful. Who are some students whose lives you have impacted whom you have seen succeed?

Newell Dayley was one of them. He came to see me after he got off his mission. I said, “What do you want to do with your life?” He said, “I want your job.” I was chairman of the department then, and so he achieved that and went beyond that: he became dean of the college and then became vice president of the university. I really can’t take credit for Newell’s success, but I did enjoy him as a student. He wasn’t actually a student in my classes so much as he was in my organizations. Jim Mason was another student of mine. He has been very kind to me; he said wonderful things about my teaching of his classes. Another was Larry Bastian; he was a top trumpet, and when he was 19, he was better than anyone in the Utah Symphony; he could have been the first-chair trumpet on the Utah Symphony when he was 20. But he went into

commercial music and was a composer and arranger and had his own company. I taught piano to Lavonne Thomander, who later worked as my accompanist when I conducted the University Chorus for six years. She is a fabulous pianist.

You had many careers in your life: educator, mentor, performer, composer. You have composed many significant works, including great works, such as *Promised Valley*, as well as some beloved hymns. “Our Savior’s Love” tells me of the depth and association that you have with the Savior. Would you share with us your testimony?

I’ve had it since I was eight years old: I knew when I was eight years old that we all have special gifts; no two of us are alike—the Lord never makes a single one of His children like another—we’re all totally individual. I recognized that, and I knew that music would be my career. I recognized that right after I was baptized and got the gift of the Holy Ghost. Now, I’m not a perfect person—no one is. We all have short falls, and we offend the Lord whenever we do something that is not in His approval. No one escapes that problem, but He has provided forgiveness if we try our best to improve the areas where we have stumbled or failed in any way. If I say an unkind word to my wife, I recognize that immediately as an offense to the Lord and an offense to her. And I try never to do that because that is a part of my testimony—my testimony that the one I married is a choice daughter of God, and He has given her to me to be the mother of my children and the grandmother to my grandchildren. That is a gift of the Father. And Christ makes it possible for us all to live together in the Eternities through the Atonement and the

resurrection of Jesus; I believe in that as a fundamental part of my existence. I have a relationship with the Savior, who made that possible, and makes it possible in my consciousness every hour of the day. I have two kinds of prayers when I’m a composer: one is the empty-page prayer, “What am I going to do on this page that’s going to be worth anything to anyone? That’s going to have any concept of beauty to anyone?” And an hour later, or a week later, or a month later, the page is full, and I get on my knees and say, “Thanks, Heavenly Father, for this wonderful page, for this wonderful melody, for this touching harmony, for this opulent orchestration.” I’ve had many of those prayers answered—many of those empty-page prayers answered. And the follow-up is the full-page prayer. Now, that comes from a heart that believes in Jesus Christ; that believes in the Prophet Joseph Smith; that believes in the veracity, beauty, and wonder of the restoration of Christ’s true church on the earth, of which I served a mission, and I served as a bishop. I believe with all my heart in these wonderful aspects of the gospel. And I bear this testimony in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



Mike and Crawford